

INFORMATION FROM ABROAD.

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OPERATIONS

OF

THE FRENCH NAVY

DURING THE

RECENT WAR WITH TUNIS.

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TRANSLATED FROM L'ANNÉE MARITIME (1880-1881),

BY

Lieutenant M. FISHER WRIGHT, U. S. Navy.

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OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE,  
BUREAU OF NAVIGATION,  
NAVY DEPARTMENT.

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#### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

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As there is much diversity in the way of spelling Arabian proper names, I have followed, wherever possible, the spelling given in Rand & McNally's "Indexed Atlas of the World."

In the original article there were several diagrams, that have necessarily been omitted.



# THE TUNISIAN EXPEDITION.

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## GENERAL REMARKS.

So far as regards the expedition to Tunis, our task concerns only the assistance given by the Navy to the land forces. The diplomatic side of the question has given rise to so many debates, not only in Parliament but also in the newspapers, that it seems superfluous to treat of it here in detail.

The cabinet of September 23, 1880 (as mentioned by M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, minister of foreign affairs, in a circular addressed June 20, 1881, to the representatives of France abroad), "had found, on assuming the reins of government, that the Tunisian question had become much entangled, and that the situation was becoming more complicated every day by a succession of events, detrimental to French influence in the Regency, and likely even to compromise our dominion in Algiers."

France had two grievances: One of them was of long standing; the other was more recent and of much greater moment. For many years our frontier was in a state of continual disturbance; our tribes bordering upon Tunis could not enjoy a moment of repose. Depredations of territory by Tunisian troops or by unsubdued tribes, burning of forests, contraband of war, refuge given to malefactors, pillaging of vessels, robberies of all kinds, murders and assassinations—all these offences and all these crimes increased beyond endurance. In ten years the outrages that could be officially stated, alone, "amounted to 2,379; that is, to about 250 per annum." The Government of the Bey was utterly powerless to prevent this inveterate evil even when it wished to do so, which was not always the case; and the damages, when obtained, were out of all proportion to the injuries sustained, not to mention the blows constantly inflicted upon our prestige through the impunity of the offenders, who sometimes even profited by the connivance of the local authorities.

Another grievance of an altogether different nature required on our part, according to M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, still more serious attention. Since the conquest of Algiers, during nearly half a century, and despite a few trivial disputes, we had lived in very good accord with Tunis; but during the year 1880 our relations became singularly altered; and it was evident that in the Government of the Bey there was a party that, controlled by imprudent advice, had adopted a policy of ousting us from all our enterprises; of ignoring our most authentic rights; of violating all contracts with us; of favoring at our expense the most un-

justifiable rivalries; of rejecting our claims, even when undoubtedly well-founded, in order to admit the most illegal pretensions of our adversaries; of menacing persons and property for the sole fault of being French; of heaping up vexations and outrages of all kinds; in a word, of undermining in detail the credit of France in Tunis in order to supplant her, and to imperil even the security of our great African colony.

This was a state of affairs that could not last indefinitely; honor, interest, and the simplest form of prudence made it our duty to put an end to it; but from considerations of a high order, France had not ceased to show much forbearance towards all these machinations, which she preferred not to encourage by attaching to them undue importance. She was still hesitating when the unexpected attack of the Kroomirs decided her, permitting her no longer to delay avenging the murder of her soldiers.

The result of our expedition is well known. Thanks to the energy of our young army, under the direction of vigilant and skillful officers, the insurgent tribes have been repulsed, almost without loss of life.

This is not the first time that France has had to interfere in Tunisian affairs. In April, 1864, an insurrection broke out in the region of Kef; the insurgents arrived within a day's march of the city of Tunis and were masters of the interior and east coast of Tunis. The Europeans feared a massacre. France sent a naval division to Tunis, but twenty-four hours afterwards a Turkish commissioner arrived with two frigates. May 28, our Mediterranean squadron anchored before Tunis, and Admiral Bouët-Willaumez notified the Turkish commissioner that he would sink any Turkish vessel attempting to land men anywhere on the Tunisian coast. The landing was not made; and November 20, Haïdar Effendi left the harbor of Goletta and returned with his two frigates to Turkish waters. The Ottoman Porte had made one more attempt to usurp the sovereignty of Tunis, and France had once more frustrated the attempt.

The Tunisian expedition has furnished a new proof of the mutual dependence existing between the Army and Navy. Before the war of 1870 we said, in one of our preceding volumes,\* there were well-meaning people who, convinced that the "nation in arms" was capable of attending to the defense of the country, demanded naturally the abolition of the standing army. "This would be," we added, "to fall into an illusion as dangerous as the belief that a well considered system of torpedoes would suffice to protect our coast from all attacks. To defend her honor and her interests, France has two arms: The Army and the Navy. To suppress or even to reduce her Navy in the present state of Europe, when most nations are turning their ambition towards maritime affairs, would be equivalent to tearing off one of her arms, and would only result in placing her in the absurd position of a nation possessing a powerful continental army, which she could not use for want of means to trans-

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\* *Année Maritime* de 1878, p. 6.



port it to the point where political exigencies might require the decisive blow to be struck."

That period is now very distant when the press and even the parliament supported the specious theory that the advent of torpedoes had deprived the Navy of its usefulness, and that that costly institution should be much reduced if not altogether abolished.

The Chilo-Peruvian war has already shown the preponderant part which the Navy may be called upon to play in general strategy. This is still further shown by the Tunisian expedition. This expedition in fact, like the Chilian war, independently of the particular interest it possesses from a naval standpoint, possesses a still greater interest as regards the conduct of combined operations of a fleet and an army.

The special mission which devolved upon the Navy in the Tunisian expedition consisted, in the first place, of the transportation of the troops and their baggage, and of insuring the revictualing of the expeditionary force. As prompt action was necessary, the Government decided to call for all the steamers of the Transatlantic Company immediately available. Four hours after receiving notice the company was ready, and without interfering with its mail service or disturbing its regular lines it effected the transport to Bona and La Calle. The port of Toulon also furnished several large transports. In five days these vessels were overhauled and their engines tested. The squadron of evolution was reserved for unforeseen contingencies.

Besides the service of transportation and revictualing, apparently so trifling but in reality so important, the Navy was to take part in the operations in a more direct manner by effecting and protecting with its own resources the landing of troops on the the coast of Tunis.

This operation of landing the troops was the most delicate and troublesome part of the Navy's duty. *The Tunisian expedition, if it had served no other purpose than to draw attention to the importance of preliminary knowledge of the characteristics of the coast where a landing is to be made, as well as of the possession of a proper equipment of lighters, boats, and floating stages, would have been of immense benefit to our sailors.* The difficulties were, at times, such that at Jerba, while landing the mules and horses, they were obliged to remain all day in the lighters where the sea covered them at times as high as the breast. Here let us remark, in passing, that the experience of this expedition seems to demonstrate the superiority of the Boulogne pinnace, which is adapted to all kinds of sea-coast and which is lifted by the breakers instead of being submerged, as often happens with the lighters.

From an administrative point of view the expedition has shown, among other things, the necessity of restoring, at least provisionally, the port regulations of Sfax, Susa, Turbarkah, Goletta, and Biserta.

The reader will not expect us to enter here into the details of the military operations on the Tunisian soil. It is sufficient, in order to give

a general sketch of the campaign, to remember that the expeditionary force was composed of five brigades, the command of which was intrusted to General Forgemol. Of these five brigades two, proceeding from the province of Constantine, were to operate by the valley of the Majerdah to the south of the enemy's country, and the other three, called brigades of reserve, or support, coming from France, were to take the coast for a base, establishing themselves in the island of Turbarkah, which had been designated in the first place as the point of landing. These last three brigades were to form the left wing of the Army.

*RECONNOISSANCE OF THE SHORES OF TURBARKAH BY  
THE GUN BOAT HYÈNE.*

APRIL 15, 1881.

On April 15, 1881, General Forgemol, commanding the expeditionary force, ordered the captain of the *Surveillante* to send the gunboat *Hyène* to visit the coast of Turbarkah. According to his instructions the captain of the *Hyène* (Lieutenant Cluze) was to confine himself to a simple reconnoissance, and was to avoid an action unless it were forced upon him. He was to try to communicate with the inhabitants and to gather information about the disposition of the native population of the mainland as well as the attitude of the Tunisian garrison. He was, moreover, to examine from a military point of view the island, its approaches, the houses, and especially the fort situated on the coast of the mainland, its ranges, the sides where it could be attacked from the sea, those by which its approaches could be defended, and also the best point to land a body of men. He was also to determine the elevation which should be given to the guns of the fleet to reach the fort, and he was to see that the soundings were marked correctly on the charts. In case the *Hyène* should find any vessels landing arms or munitions of war, he was to maintain a passive attitude unless the vessels were French, in which case they were to be seized.

Lieutenant Cluze performed his mission very skilfully. Having left the anchorage of the *Surveillante* at ten o'clock, he found at daybreak that he was four miles to the eastward of the island. He had taken the precaution in approaching Cape Turbarkah to extinguish his starboard light and his mast-head light. He then changed his course and steered for the land as if coming from Cape Negro. He coasted along near the shore. The land here was a succession of dunes of white sand and seemed altogether uninhabited. Having made the circuit of the island he chose an anchorage for the large vessels to the westward, and then sent a boat in to reconnoiter.

On approaching, a large number of armed men was seen upon the island and also on the mainland. A commotion in the fort was also noticed. On the island there were about 40 men, two of whom were

Tunisian sentinels. On the mainland there were about 400 men. While the boat was taking soundings, the natives, angered by seeing it so near, crowded into the fort, loading their guns. They filled the air with shouts, calling for their officers, and would undoubtedly have committed some overt act of hostility if the captain of the *Hyène* had not recalled the whale-boat. Just then a shot was heard and a bullet fell alongside. This shot was succeeded by several others, and the captain, in obedience to his instructions, weighed anchor and steamed away at full speed after having received about forty shots, which whistled harmlessly over the deck.

On leaving, the *Hyène* steered for a small Italian craft that was making for the island. She then returned under Cape Turbarkah, and threaded her way, at a little distance from the coast, as far as Cape Roux. Several musket-shots were fired at her from the mountains. The cattle were grazing, and the men were working in the fields. The gunboat came to anchor off La Calle.

Thus was accomplished the reconnoissance of Turbarkah. Lieutenant Cluze had determined the position of his anchorage by means of angles; and the soundings he found to agree substantially with those on the charts. The fort, on the faces which command the anchorages to the east and to the west, was armed with eight guns, four on the front and two on each bastion. These guns appeared to be old-fashioned muzzle-loaders. In the south-east bastion, however, there was a heavier gun. The south face was somewhat dilapidated. The island was almost completely abandoned, and the chateau-fort in ruins was not armed.

The results of the reconnoissance just made can be summed up as follows:

With a ship armed with heavy guns anchored to the westward to silence the fort, and a smaller vessel to make the passage impracticable and to prevent re-enforcements from the mainland, the landing of troops and occupation of the island would be easy. For this purpose it would be necessary to be in position by daybreak. Once master of the island the fort could be easily captured and held.

#### *THE LANDING AT TURBARKAH.*

APRIL 26.

The *Tourville* not having sufficient armor to attack a fort, embarked the troops, material, and horses discharged from the *Surveillante*.

The *Surveillante* left the harbor of Bona April 17, 1881, at 9 p. m., and appeared before Turbarkah, accompanied by the three gunboats, the *Chacal*, the *Léopard*, and the *Hyène*. She carried the small force intended to act as a corps of occupation (500 infantry, a section of artillery, and a section of the engineers), with its provisions, horses, mules, and material.

Towards the end of the passage an accident to the *Hyène's* engine obliged her to be taken in tow and delayed the arrival of the squadron

before the island, so that the people along the coast had time to signal the presence of the flotilla to the interior. The *Surveillante* anchored (7 30 a. m., April 22) at 1,300 meters to the north of Bordj-Djèdid.\* Another ship, the *Corrèze*, had arrived with a re-enforcement (two battalions of the line) for the expeditionary force. But the necessity of acting cautiously, and above all the unfavorable state of the sea, which rendered the landing very perilous, necessitated a delay.

The following were the measures taken by the captain of the *Surveillante* should the governor refuse to surrender the fort or in case he should resist, as he had said that he would :

The point chosen for the landing was the part of the beach to the eastward of the fort between the mouth of the river Turbarkah and the sand shoal which at low water connected the island with the mainland. This place, which was the most sheltered and the most accessible, was of sufficient extent to permit the simultaneous landing of all our boats. We were, therefore, able to land so many men at once that they could protect themselves. The landing was covered to the left by the river, whose passage was commanded by the *Hyène* and *Chacal*, in which a section of infantry had been embarked. The hills which commanded the landing-place on the west and south, and the ravine between the two that led to the fort, formed an amphitheater that could easily be kept clear of the enemy by the fire of our artillery. Our troops, therefore, could land without being seriously molested provided that the east front of the fort could be silenced. This was the object to be attained by the bombardment which was to precede the landing. The fort besides was very poorly armed ; so far as we could find out, the only piece at all formidable was a rifled gun mounted in barbette on the southeast bastion.

The *Tourville*, encumbered with men, horses, material, and munitions, and essentially vulnerable, was placed where she would be almost completely sheltered from the fire of the enemy, and where her plunging fire would render the fort untenable.

The station of the *Surveillante* was as close as possible (at about 1,800 meters), the guns of her battery not being able to reach the fort, on account of its elevation, at a less distance than 1,700 meters. The gunboats were so disposed as not to interfere with the fire of the larger vessels. The *Tourville* was to come closer in after the bombardment in order to facilitate the landing of her troops; the *Corrèze* was to do the same, her first anchorage, masked by the summit of the island, being out of sight from the fort.

The landing itself was to be effected in accordance with a plan arranged beforehand. On April 23 everything was ready, the *Tourville* and *Surveillante* had taken their position for the attack on the fort. The 24th was the day fixed upon by General Forgemol for the landing of the expeditionary force, but the weather on that day was so bad that delay

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\* Name of the fort on mainland.

was unavoidable. On April 25, the swell having gone down somewhat, the captain of the *Surveillante* seized the opportunity which seemed about to escape, feeling sure to finish, on the next day, an undertaking which could not be entirely effected in one afternoon. He sent a summons to the governor, and on receiving an unsatisfactory reply, he opened fire at four o'clock. The gunboats could not take part on account of the heavy swell; they limited themselves to firing upon the island, which was quickly abandoned. The garrison, seeing that when we occupied the fort they would be taken prisoners, fled to the mainland by way of the sandy shoal.

Although the fort made no reply, the *Surveillante* continued the fire until the entire east front was dismantled in order that the troops should have no fear that the enemy might change their minds during the landing, and fire upon the lighters. The captain of the *Léopard* stated that the fire of the *Surveillante* (2,000 meters), after the first few shots, was almost mathematically correct, while that of the *Tourville* (4,000) was regulated more slowly, but also became very accurate. The effect of our shells on the masonry, of rather poor quality, was very great. At 5.30, the captain of the *Surveillante* judging that the fort was then harmless on that side, made signal to cease firing. At nightfall the *Tourville* directed her electric light upon the shore, and several shells were fired in the direction of some Kroomir camps, where large camp-fires were seen.

Early in the morning of the 26th the *Corrèze* and the *Tourville* took their positions for the landing; but the heavy swell caused by the fresh night breeze not permitting a landing on the beach, Captain Lacombe (commanding the *Surveillante*) ordered the island to be occupied by a section of the naval brigade and a section of infantry; this was done, and the troops met with no resistance. Our sailors made prisoners of two Tunisian soldiers who had remained on the island from fear of the Kroomirs, who had pillaged them the night before.

While this was being done, the *La Gallissonière*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Conrad, was signaled from the point of Turbarkah, and she soon afterwards came to anchor near the island.

The captain of the *Surveillante* had sent Commander Galache, who was in charge of the landing, to see if the beach were suitable, and his report being favorable the landing was commenced with the aid of the steam-launch and large cutters of the *La Gallissonière*.

The beach having been cleared by the fire of the *Surveillante* and the gunboats detailed for that service, the landing progressed very rapidly. The first body of troops was landed at 2 o'clock, and at 5.50 the entire force, comprising artillery, baggage, and some mules for the pieces, as well as a considerable quantity of provisions and munitions of reserve, was safely landed without any danger of its communication with the fleet being interrupted.

As soon as a certain number of men had been landed, the troops took possession of the heights that commanded the beach and the river,

and then others pushed on to the fort, where the French flag was hoisted at 3.45. The sharpshooters on the left had, by their fire, driven off the Arabs who showed themselves in the plain and on the opposite declivities. During all these operations Arab horsemen were seen in the plain and behind the sand dunes which bordered the east coast; they were kept at a distance, however, by the machine guns of the larger vessels and the fire of the Hyène and Chacal.

The night was calm; the plain and the river were kept illuminated by the electric lights of the vessels, and the Arabs did not approach the sentries.

At 4.30 of the 27th, the landing of stores, &c., was resumed with all possible activity. The *Surveillante* furnished working parties to the Tourville and to the Corrèze, but at 10.30 the beach having become unsuitable on account of the heavy sea the landing was suspended and the boats were recalled. The sea was so high that most of the vessels were unable to hoist their boats, which were anchored under the lee of the island, where were also the gunboats. The weather soon became very bad and did not mend until the 28th. On the 29th with much trouble a few boat loads were landed.

Thus it may be seen that the bad weather caused much trouble and delay in landing and discharging the boats; the gunboats in particular suffered very much, whether at anchor or in their communication with the port of Calle.

On the morning of April 30, the *Surveillante* arrived at Bona, and reported to Rear-Admiral Conrad to co-operate in the occupation of Biserta.

#### THE LANDING AT BISERTA.

MAY 3, 1881.

The island of Turbarkah served very well for shelter; but it could hardly answer as a base of operations. It was, therefore, necessary to get possession of a seaport, through which the expeditionary force might be efficiently revictualled. The squadron of evolution was therefore ordered to occupy Biserta, a magnificent port situated east of Turbarkah and 60 kilometers NNW. of Tunis. The squadron, consisting of the four iron-clads, the Alma, the La Gallissonière, the *Surveillante*, and the Reine-Blanche, appeared on the 3d of May, before Biserta. The naval brigade was landed, and the following is the report addressed by Rear-Admiral Conrad to the Minister of Marine:

"I announce to you the occupation of Biserta, which took place this morning at 11. It was accomplished by the landing of the naval brigade (*division navale*), without resistance, after the governor had submitted to the summons addressed to him. The transports carrying the troops have not arrived and are detained by a heavy southeast wind; as soon as they arrive I will relieve the seamen who at present occupy the town.

The situation is very good, the forts are occupied, and every precaution taken to guard against any accident. The captain of the Alma is in command on shore. I

have received no communication from foreign consuls. This satisfactory result, obtained without firing a shot, is due to the combined action of a heavy naval force. Officers and seamen have displayed the most meritorious zeal."

The transports mentioned above were the Sarthe and the Dryade. The troops, which were embarked at Toulon, comprised a regiment of infantry, a battalion of "chasseurs à pied," and a battery of artillery—about 2,000 men.

#### *BOMBARDMENT OF SFAX.*

JULY 5, 1881.

The necessity of acting with vigor in the province of Oran, where, as the result of a premature retreat of a part of the first expeditionary force, the fanatic Marabouts were trying to provoke an insurrection, forced the Government to send troops into that province. In fact, the garrison of Tunis had been withdrawn too soon, for the excitement was far from being calmed.

The village of Sfax, on the coast, was soon overrun by bands of Arabs secretly incited by Turkey and by other secret influences. The Europeans took refuge aboard the squadron, and Sfax was to be bombarded by sea. These events also rendered necessary the occupation of Cables and of the island of Jerba.

The following is an account, according to the correspondent of *Le Temps*, of what took place before Sfax from the 5th to the 9th of July:

July 5, the *Reine-Blanche*, Captain Marquessac, ordered the *Chacal* to bombard the water battery, getting as near in shore as possible. This vessel approached to within 5,000 meters and soon commenced firing. The land batteries replied, their shot at first falling short, but little by little they corrected their aim until finally their shot reached the ship. After an hour's bombardment the *Reine-Blanche* made signal to cease firing, after which the shore battery fired five shots. At this moment the gunboat *Pique* entered the harbor; and soon it was seen that our guns had made a breach in the water battery. The land batteries had fired only eighteen times.

During the night of the 5th and 6th the besieged repaired as well as they could the damages the battery had sustained, with large balls of pressed grass.

About 4.30, July 6, the *Reine-Blanche* and the *Alma* approached the land; and towards 5.40 these corvettes opened fire on the town, the first on the part to the right of the minaret, the second on the part to the left. The fire was slow. After the crews had their dinner the gunboats *Pique* and *Chacal* took up their fighting positions, at 2,400 meters from the shore, in about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  meters of water, then, at 12.15, commenced the general bombardment of the town and forts. The land batteries replied with thirteen shots, fired more particularly at the *Chacal*, but their fire was soon silenced. The *Hyène* arrived and anchored near the *Chacal* at 4.15. The same evening, at 8.30, the *Reine-Blanche* fired one more

shot at the town, and an hour afterwards the Pique set sail for Susa. At the end of the general bombardment of July 6, the order was given to fire on the Casbah,\* at the extreme left of the town. Firing ceased at 3 p. m., by order of the senior officer.

Early on the morning of July 7 the corvettes, the Reine-Blanche and the Alma, recommenced their slow fire upon the town. At 9.40 in the morning the two gunboats Hyène and Chacal were sprung around to present their starboard batteries to the enemy. They commenced firing upon the land batteries at 11.10. Some moments afterwards the steam-launch of the Alma, carrying Commander Morel-Beaulieu and several other naval officers, having approached very close to the land in making a reconnoissance, fired some very well-directed shots on the water battery, which replied with several shots, none of which, however, hit the mark. During the evening the "canot-tambour," a sort of shallow barge made of sheet-iron, armed with a gun of 14 centimeters, approached the land very closely to join with the steam launches of the squadron in firing on the water battery.

On Friday, July 8, a military demonstration was made with the armed launches of the Alma, Sarthe, and Reine-Blanche, which approached the land to within 1,000 meters, and kept up a lively fire on the enemy. At 10.25 the Hyène and Chacal came to the support of the boats. Shortly afterwards the captains of the Alma and the Reine-Blanche, as well as the chief of the mountain battery, assembled aboard the Chacal, whence orders were issued to the different points by the senior officer as the action developed itself. The enemy responded with seven shots, one of which, from a mitrailleuse, was fired at the boats and wounded a sailor slightly. At 11.45 the order was given to *cease firing*, and a general recall was hoisted. Our fire aimed at the right and left extremes of the town had most effect upon the Arab market, upon the more imposing Moorish house to the right of the town, and on the battery of the Catholic church, the fire from the latter having struck the spars of the gunboats several times. At 1.25 the senior officer's flag was hauled down, and the captains left the Chacal to join their respective vessels. During the night of the 8th and 9th July, reconnoissances were made close in shore. On Saturday morning the Reine-Blanche, Alma, Hyène, and Chacal fired on the batteries, which replied with only two shots. On the following days all was quiet.

#### STORMING AND CAPTURE OF SFAX.

JULY 14-15, 1881.

The squadron arrived off Sfax on the 14th of July. The approach to the town by sea had been made very difficult, the steam-launches and large boats not being able to approach the beach nearer than 300 or 400 meters. The smallest cutters were able to get into the beach

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\* The Casbah is the name of the citadel of the town.



only at high tide. The bottom was composed of mud so deep and soft that the men were unable to wade ashore.

Having anchored the iron-clads according to their draft of water at a mean distance from the shore of 6,500 meters, Admiral Garnault ordered a slow bombardment with the heavy pivot guns, while the gunboats, stationed at 2,200 meters, were to demolish the defenses erected on the beach, and to make a breach in the high walls of the city.

On the morning of the 16th of July, after a very violent bombardment which began at daylight, the commander-in-chief ordered the landing of the naval brigade of the squadron, and that of the division of the *Levant*, together with the six battalions of the 92d and 136th regiments of the line under command of Colonel Jamais. Taking advantage of the high tide, the blue-jackets dashed towards the shore with an enthusiasm and energy surpassing all praise, and occupied successively the different points of the beach and the town. They blew up the gates by means of gun-cotton, which had been prepared for the purpose in advance, and they engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict from house to house. The battalion of the 92d landed about half an hour after the seamen, and their help was very welcome in face of the organized resistance which the naval brigade now encountered. The other battalions soon followed.

The loss sustained by the landing corps was 9 killed, of whom 7 were sailors, and among them Midshipman Leonnec of the *Alma*, and 40 wounded, among them Ensign Vignier, of the *Revanche*, wounded slightly in the face.

The following is a synopsis of the arrangements made in view of the bombardment and landing:

According to orders given by the commander-in-chief, the bombardment was to begin between 4.30 and 5 a. m. at the first shot from the *Colbert*. It was to be so arranged that all the boats loaded with men were to arrive as near to the beach as possible before 6 a. m. A signal by flag from the *Leopard*, and repeated by all the vessels, was to indicate the moment to dash in and land.

The boats of the fleet, together with some native boats (called *mahonnes*) which had been pressed into service, afforded room for landing 3,000 men at once; of these 1,500 were sailors and 1,400 soldiers—the former in the *Intrépide* and the latter in the *Sarthe*; the infantry remaining on the large transports were to be landed as soon as the boats could return.

The admiral himself superintended the order, rapidity, and security of the landing, so that once ashore the troops, immediately formed, could at once, under the general command of Colonel Jamais, be marched upon the points where they were to operate.

As the water shoaled very gradually, there was but one point where the boats could approach the beach, and this point was exposed to the fire of the town batteries. The admiral had also ordered a sort of float-

ing landing-stage to be made by using the topsail-yards of the various iron-clads. This raft was to be constructed under the charge of Captain Juge, as near as possible to the beach.

The pulling-boats of the Colbert, Revanche, and Friedland, armed and equipped, as well as the iron barges (canot-tambour) of the Sarthe and Intrépide (each carrying a large howitzer), under the command of Captain Trillot, were to be, between 4.30 and 5 a. m., as near the beach as possible, and were to aid the gunboats by their fire in sweeping the shore to protect the flotilla.

The several rafts which had been prepared by the six iron-clads were to be towed during the night before as near the beach as possible by the steam-launch belonging to each vessel. Captain Juge was charged with the task of lashing them together and towing them ashore with the whale-boats, to serve as a landing stage. Each iron-clad was to provide two torpedo-boats, furnished with small torpedoes and with sand-bags made on board.

The landing at the beach was to be commanded by Captain Marques-sac, of the Reine-Blanche, having under his orders Captains Morel-Beaulieu, Juge, and Trillot, as well as all the officers of the whale-boats.

The companies of the landing-party were divided into three battalions, commanded respectively by Captains Miot of the Alma, Mareq. Saint-Hilaire of the Colbert, and Maréchal of the Trident; the artillery of the squadron was under the orders of Captain Tabareau of the Revanche.

The squadron had furnished a detachment of torpedo-boats to blow up any obstacles, and the whale-boats were reserved to tow the floating stage and to facilitate afterwards the landing of the boats carrying the troops.

Thirty-eight *mahonnes*, each furnished with four oars for poling, with the armed boats of the squadron, were to get their allotted contingent of men from the Sarthe, La Gallissonnière, Reine-Blanche, Alma, Colbert, Revanche, Friedland, Trident, Surveillante, Marengo, and Intrépide. The landing points indicated were the Marine wharf and the Alpha wharf.

On the morning of the 16th, between 2.30 and 3, the different operations began. On one hand the squadron bombarded the town; the whale-boats and a steam-launch took the floating stage in tow, and the armed boats formed in line of battle 500 meters to the eastward of the water-battery. The landing stage was hauled in very easily after an anchor had been carried ashore by which to warp it in.

Besides the permanent defenses of the place, the Arabs had made, by means of trenches and bundles of hay and grass, advanced works well armed, which it was necessary to demolish. These trenches were swept by the fire from the ships, which set fire to the bundles of hay. The east wind drove the smoke back on the town, and the trenches had to be abandoned by their defenders. At the same time the boats and the gunboats, by their fire, prevented the arrival of Arabs from the outside.

Rear-Admiral Conrad had hoisted his flag on board the *Léopard*. When he thought the circumstances favorable he hoisted the signal, and the boats, which, massed near the land, had been exposed to the poorly aimed fire of the enemy, made the best of their way to the beach, and the landing took place, each detachment soon being engaged. The rapid carrying of the water-battery and of the south trench by the men of the *Trident*, who had landed first, under Ensign Coutourier, enabled the landing force to form on the beach, and from that time the operation was continued by a series of isolated actions. The bombardment had driven away the Arabs, but had not made a practicable breach in the walls. Then it was that the boat guns and torpedoes proved of great service in blowing up the gates, which gave access to the town to the right and to the left. Once inside, the column of attack advanced under the fire of the enemy by occupying the houses one after the other. The battalion of the division of the *Levant*, having as an objective point the *Casbah*, had the furthest to go; Commander Miot, after having blown up the two interior gates, took possession of the *Casbah* at 7.30 a. m.

During the whole action communication was constantly kept up between the different detachments, from the right where the 92d and 136th were, to the left where Miot had command. These communications were kept up by Captain Marcq de Saint-Hilaire, who was in constant communication with Colonel Jamais.

The foregoing gives a good idea of the operation as a whole. As for the details of the different engagements in which the soldiers and sailors took part before becoming masters of the town, the best way to describe them will be to give the reports of the officers engaged.

Following is the report of Rear-Admiral Conrad, commanding the naval division of the *Levant*, submitted to the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean squadron of evolution.

ON BOARD THE *LA GALLISSONNIÈRE*,

*At Anchor off Sfax, July 18, 1881.*

MONSIEUR LE VICE-AMIRAL: I have the honor to submit to you, in accordance with your order, the following report of the military operations, which resulted on July 16 in the forcible occupation of Sfax.

You had the kindness in taking charge of these operations to give the post of honor in this attack to the division of the *Levant*, which was first on the spot, to entrust to Captain de Marquessac, commanding the *Reine-Blanche*, the command of the landing, rendered very difficult by local conditions, and to Captain Miot, commanding the *Alma*, the command of the naval brigade from the *Levant* division with the duty of occupying as quickly as possible the *Casbah*. You also authorized me to hoist my flag during the action on board the *Léopard*, in order to direct the fire of the gun-boats. I am deeply indebted to you, Admiral, for these different marks of confidence, and I venture to hope that the brilliant manner in which the assault was conducted by the captains of the *Reine-Blanche* and the *Alma* has received your highest approbation.

Thanks to the far-seeing orders which you had issued, all the seamen of the landing

party were at their posts by day-break. Covered by the general bombardment of the iron-clads and of the gun-boats, and afterwards sustained by the fire of the boats stationed to cover the landing, and by the fire of the howitzers which the Sarthe and Intrépide had mounted in their lighters, the naval brigade (formed in three columns at about 1,000 meters from the water-battery) approached the points of landing. The two columns on the left steered toward the wharf in face of the battery, and the right column toward a wharf about 200 meters to the right, called the Alpha wharf; the pilot, however, fearing that there would not be enough water at this point, Captain de Marquessac caused the third column to land at the same place as the other two.

The Casbah, the water-battery of the mole, and the fort called the Trois-Pièces, which was near it, had opened a fire of machine-guns upon our boats; at the same time a lively fusillade was kept up from the houses and from a trench parallel to the shore. In spite of this fire the boats and lighters poled themselves as rapidly as possible toward the landing-place, where Captain Juge had fixed the bridge constructed of the topsail-yards of the iron-clads. It would be impossible for me to praise too highly the promptness and precision with which these movements were executed by Captain Juge under a heavy fire. Thanks to this skilful arrangement, the troops landed dry-shod in spite of the shoal water, while the seamen, leaping from their boats, drove away the defenders of the battery and pursued to the left those in the south trench. Captain Miot fastened his boat-flag to an embrasure of the water-battery, while a boat's crew from the Trident did the same, perhaps even a few seconds sooner. It was at this moment that a number of sailors fell, killed or wounded.

The Arabs were driven back with great loss, and the two columns, led by Captains Miot and Saint-Hilaire, dashed into the town through the breach.

The landing company of the La Gallissonière was charged with the duty of capturing the fort called Trois-Pièces; this it accomplished by scaling the walls, and Mr. Banon, midshipman of the first class, and Gaubert, quarter-gunner, hauled down the flag, which they replaced with the French ensign. The guns were spiked and the powder was sent to the reserve, while a vigorous fight was carried on against the Arabs established in the neighboring houses.

Captain Miot conducted his attack most brilliantly and drove back the Arabs, driving them out of the trench and from the houses where they fired on him as he advanced. He blew up the gate of the Arab town by means of a torpedo, and with the companies of the Reine-Blanche and of the Alma he charged upon the Casbah. This fort was occupied at 7.45 a. m. During the charge the fire of the enemy was deadly, and it was before the Casbah that Mr. Leouneq, midshipman of the first class, received the wounds of which he soon afterwards died.

The fire of the vessels had ceased since the landing, the gunboats alone continuing to fire a few shots at the Arabs flying from our troops. The different convoys of boats were ceaselessly employed in landing troops from the Intrépide; and in a few hours the entire Expeditionary Force, infantry and artillery, was safely landed.

The first battalion landed (92d of the line) made its way to the extreme right toward the cemetery, where a very lively engagement took place, and then to the extremity of the Alfa warehouses; the first company engaged had a great number wounded there, about twenty, of whom two were officers. It was at this moment, 9.20, that the armed boats, concentrating on the right, silenced the enemy's fire, while the battery of howitzers contributed to this result by establishing itself at the northeast angle of the town.

To sum up, the taking of Sfax does great credit to the marksmanship of our gunners, to the irresistible dash of our sailors, and to the troops who assisted them.

I have the honor, &c.,

CONRAD.

As we have seen, Captain de Saint-Hilaire had been placed in charge of the landing on the beach at Sfax. The following is his report upon the operations accomplished under his directions:

ON BOARD THE COLBERT,

*At Anchor off Sfax, July 17, 1881.*

ADMIRAL: I have the honor to submit to you the following report of the part taken by the naval brigade of the squadron in the capture of Sfax.

*Dispositions and orders.*—Foreseeing that a separation was almost inevitable, the infantry was formed into two battalions, composed of each of the divisions of the squadron. I reserved to myself more especially the command of the first and Captain Maréchal commanded the second. The artillery as usual formed two batteries (of 6 pieces of 65<sup>mm</sup>. each) under the orders of Commander Tabareau; the squadron furnished in addition a torpedo squad commanded by Lieutenant Lafon; Surgeon Gillet had charge of the ambulances.

The naval brigade carried with it provisions for the day; the men had 96 cartridges each, the artillery carried 56 charges for each gun; a reserve of provisions and ammunition was also formed. In so far as the actual landing was concerned I was under the orders of Captain Marquessac, who commanded that part of the operations. The first battalion, in native boats (mahonnes), which were first towed and afterward poled, was to keep in the only existing channel, just behind the mahonnes of the division of the Levant, and was to land, as well as the latter, at the wharf of the Marine. The second battalion, keeping to the left in the armed launches of its division, was first to clear the beach and then to land at the same place as the first battalion. The 92d battalion of infantry was to land simultaneously with the seamen at a point 300 meters to the right. After the landing, according to the orders of Colonel Jamais, in general command of the troops, I was to occupy the quartier-franc\* on the left and take charge of the operations on that side. I gave my orders in advance accordingly.

The first troops landed were to charge upon the battery and the trenches which I expected to find on the beach, in case they still held out against the division of the Levant. They were afterward to advance into the quartier-franc\* by the left, while looking out for an attack from that side. The last companies were to serve as a reserve. The first battery had orders to push its sections forward as rapidly as they could form, and had for its general position the center of the action; the second battery was to support the operations of the left. (The battery of the division of the Levant was to co-operate in the attack on the right, which was entrusted to the 92d battalion of the line.)

*Operations.*—The boats arrived at the appointed time and the landing took place in the order indicated, the mahonnes keeping in the center and steering for the battery in line with the two towers. On approaching the shore the second battalion cast off the tow-ropes and rowed in the rest of the distance. The 92d being somewhat slow, I sent to them the Surveillante's steam-launch. Soon afterward I ordered the second battalion to incline to the right, as they were in danger of going too far to the left. The pilot having warned the commanding officer of the 92d that the water would probably be too shoal at the Alfa wharf, the latter ordered the battalion to land at the Marine wharf, which thus became the only landing point.

When the flag was hoisted,† most of the boats being 300 or 400 meters from the shore, I caused the charge to be sounded. At the same time cries of "Forward" were to be heard on all sides, and all the boats hastened to the shore at their utmost speed, some by rowing and others by poling, but all of them showing magnificent zeal and energy in spite of the spirited fire kept up from shore. The second battalion, quicker in their boats than the first in the mahonnes, and favored by deeper water than was expected,

\*District occupied by Europeans.

†This flag was the signal for the boats to dash in and land as mentioned before.

poled their boats ashore, crossing in ahead of the first battalion. The first-launch of the Trident was the first to reach the wharf under the battery and received, fortunately without effect, a cannon-shot almost at the muzzle. Ensign Conturier, with remarkable bravery, jumped upon the wharf; a fusileer was killed next to him; another fusileer, named Martin, dashed into the battery with him and hauled down the green flag; the company of the Trident landed under a very lively fire and attacked the Arabs in the trench and battery, which they forced them to evacuate.

When I landed myself some moments afterwards at the foot of the battery, to the right of the wharf, leaving behind the first battalion, which, in spite of the best intentions, could not arrive at the same time, I perceived about two sections of the *Surveillantes* just forming at my left under the trench. Then pushing forward I saw the company of the Trident reassembling under the bastion to the right, in order to take their position on the left. A little beyond the *Surveillante's* men, the boats, which had reached the shore, were landing their men in some confusion, which was unavoidable on account of the ardor of some, the limited space at which a landing was feasible, and the disorder caused by the unforeseen change in the order of landing.

The 92d was still at some distance. I sent my midshipman, Mr. Homsy, to find the captain of the *Surveillante*, but he could not be found. I have since learned that he had just gone to the right. I sent an order to the *Marengos*, who were just landing, to hasten towards the left to support the *Tridents*. I then went myself to the central gate of the *quartier-franc*, leaving orders to send me a section of artillery and the first troops that should be available; I expected to throw them into the town after having demolished the gate. While waiting, having a few men with me, I attempted to force the gate, but was unsuccessful. Finally a section of artillery appeared, the *Trident's*, I believe. Just as the battery had got into position Mr. Lafon arrived with his torpedo squad. I ordered the artillery to keep fast, and had the gate blown up by a torpedo.

Hearing on the left a lively fusillade which seemed to be approaching, I went in that direction and found the *Tridents* at the Harbi gate and the *Marengos* further to the left, near the sea, firing upon a band of Arabs and some horsemen who had made a sortie from the Harbi gate, and exchanging a lively fusillade with the *Casbah*. The *Marengos*, more sheltered than the others, were in advance, as well as a section of the *Colberts*. The *Colberts* dashed on in pursuit of the Arabs, and exposed themselves more than I could have wished. While thus engaged a man named Brenot was severely wounded; he, together with a sergeant of the *Trident*, had thrown themselves into the midst of the Arabs. Brenot struck down two of them, seized one of their flags, and at that moment fell, pierced by two bullets. This, of course, obliged the whole section to advance to his relief; and having done so, they fell back. I then advanced as far as the angle of the *Casbah*. Having assured myself of the state of affairs in that direction, I returned to the *quartier-franc*, leaving the two companies with orders to blow up the Harbi gate. On my return I rallied another section of the *Colbert*. This company, scattered in the *mahonnes* belonging to different groups and being the last to land, were somewhat disorganized. I entered the town by the central gate, which Mr. Lafon had blown up during my tour of observation towards the left. During this time the landing had been completed and all the companies had entered the town; that of the *Revanche* by the *Cherchi* gate, which it had demolished by cannon-shot; that of the *Friedland* and a part of that of the *Colbert* by the breach to the right of the bastion. The town was crowded with our men, both artillery and infantry, but all blue-jackets. Some shots were exchanged with the Arabs who were in the houses.

I arrived at the gate of the Arab town just as the first gate was blown up. I found there Colonel Jamais and Captain Miot. It was then 7.20 a. m. I reported the state of affairs on the left and received Colonel Jamais' orders; he enjoined me to keep up my advance in that direction but not to advance too far. I then left Mr. Lafon and his torpedo corps under the orders of Captain Miot, and I also left as a reserve in the town the companies of the *Revanche* and the *Trident*, which I had assembled, with orders to search the

houses. I took with me the Friedlands and the Colberts with their sections of artillery, hoping that I could make use of them. As for the Surveillantes, I had no information of their whereabouts but I supposed that they were on the extreme right.

We filed along the wall of the town and went out by the Harbi gate. Just as the artillery was passing through the gate it was met by a lively fusillade from a house on the left. The Friedlands had a man killed there, and the La Gallissonnières and the Reine-Blanches had some men disabled. The artillery then took up a position in the rear in order to fire on the houses, but they were soon sent to the right where they were urgently needed.

We continued to advance towards the north. On the corner of the Casbah we saw the French flag hoisted at 7.50 and our men greeted the sight with cries of "The republic forever." We kept on our way, the Friedlands and the artillery keeping close to the walls and the Colberts at some distance out. Soon after this the Friedlands had four men wounded by musketry fire from the middle tower. We then advanced rapidly as far as the west angle of the town, followed by those men of the 136th that by this time had landed; we waited some time in this position answering the fire from the embrasures and occasionally firing at the Arabs posted on the garden side. At one time it appeared to us that the cavalry was massing behind the oil magazines and we made ready to "receive cavalry." Nothing resulted from it, however. I then ordered the Colberts to occupy the oil magazines, and the Friedlands, with a section of the Alma that had followed us, were ordered to carry the Bab-Gabbi gate. The magazines were occupied without difficulty, but it was far otherwise with the gate. This last operation was very well carried out by Mr. Texier, who entered the town and occupied the grand mosque. In this engagement a number of Arabs were killed in attempting to gain the open country.

Some Arabs still remaining in the gardens before us, I sent there the Colberts and a company of the 136th, who exchanged some shots with them. Our riflemen moving by the right flank joined those of the 92d battalion, who were still engaged in front of the magazines on the east. I also sent a section of artillery to their assistance. I then placed myself in communication with the commanding officer, and, considering our task as finished, I recalled every one I had in advance, including the Surveillantes, whom I found at the extreme right towards the sea and whom I had not seen since morning. Our men, being very much fatigued, were allowed to rest themselves under shelter of the walls, and I went to the principal gate to report to the colonel. We fortunately found a well in the town near the gate, and I had the fact made known to the men. While our men were occupied in getting water a fusillade was poured upon them from a little mosque on the opposite side. Fortunately it did no damage, but it was necessary to dislodge the enemy. The Friedlands, who occupied that part of the town, were given charge of the operation. We were unable to accomplish this until the arrival of Mr. Lafon, who, having been detained inside the town, had not been able to arrive until this moment. As soon as the door was blown in the Arabs surrendered. We captured forty-two prisoners, of whom one seemed a personage of some importance; but we had five men killed and eight wounded. These prisoners were sent to headquarters. I visited all the posts that we had established inside the town, and, receiving no reply from headquarters, I went there myself. While traversing the Arab town I could see no one except the Friedlands in the northern part; the other quarters seemed entirely deserted. I found the colonel in the "quartier-franc." After having received my report he told me that he was about to relieve us, as he had no further need of our services, and said that I might return on board, thanking me at the same time for the assistance of the sailors. Retracing my steps through the town I had all my men assembled and marched them to the beach. I installed myself in one of the houses there. Captain Maréchal was obliged to wait some time for the troops which were to relieve him.

Towards 3 p. m. the entire brigade was reassembled on the beach. The men were ex-

hausted and I was unable to issue to them a ration of bread and wine, as I would have liked to do, the steam-launches containing the provisions being occupied in towing. I called the captains together to inform me of what I had been unable to see and to report their losses. The quartermasters of companies were sent to identify the killed, who had been placed in a house of the quartier-franc; as for the wounded, they had been sent aboard the Sarthe as fast as they were brought down to the beach.

The following is a *résumé* of what happened in my rear and on the right:

The Revanches, whom I had left in the town to search it thoroughly, had in this operation two men killed and three wounded, among whom was Mr. Vignier, ensign. The Marengos, after the engagement on the left which followed the landing and during which one of their men was severely wounded, remained as a corps of observation on the left of the European quarter. The Trident, which occupied the "villefranche," had, in searching it, five men wounded, among them sergeant-at-arms Duclos, who was wounded while going with quartermaster Droualt, under fire from a house, to the assistance of two wounded men of another vessel. The Tridents, relieved by a company of infantry, then hastened to the right, where they assisted in the attack on the oil magazines.

As for the Surveillantes, two of whose sections I had seen forming at the commencement and whom I had not seen again until much later, on the extreme right, they had played a very brilliant part. With his first two sections landed, the captain, Lamothe-Duportail, had followed for an instant the Tridents, had then repulsed an attack on the right and had driven back the enemy in that direction, being joined by Captain Maréchal, who had command of that wing. They soon reached the cemetery without loss. There an engagement of sharpshooters took place with the Arabs, in which the Surveillante had one man killed and three wounded. The Surveillantes were supported successively by a section of the Tridents commanded by Mr. Reynaud, midshipman, and landed probably the last; then by her two rear sections, and finally by a company of the 92d of the line and by artillery. The inclosure which is beyond the cemetery was charged and carried at the point of the bayonet. One man was killed and two wounded. The affair wound up with an engagement of sharpshooters, the Surveillantes holding the right towards the sea and the 92d the left. The latter pursued as far as the gardens and sustained serious losses. This affair, vigorously and skilfully conducted, cost the Tridents one killed and three wounded; the Surveillantes, two killed and five wounded. The battalion of the Levant division, whose function it was to act in the center, assisted by torpedoes, had entered the town and occupied the Casbah.

The hospital service not only in the front as regards transportation and immediate surgical aid, but also in the rear in the ambulances, worked very well; that of the squadron, being the only one organized, served for all hands.

Such, admiral, is the part taken by the corps placed under my command in the capture of Sfax. I hope you will find cause to be pleased with it. Every one did his duty. The part played was more or less brilliant according to circumstances and the post assigned to each; but all burned with desire to distinguish themselves. I take the liberty of warmly recommending to your favorable consideration the propositions which accompany this report.

In conclusion, I shall narrate the circumstances of my return. Towards 3 p. m. I sent you word by your aide-de-camp, Mr. Lemerrier, that I was awaiting your orders to return on board. Later I received a dispatch from the chief of staff, informing me that after an arrangement with the colonel we were to pass the night on land. (Another confirming this did not reach me until I got on board.) I communicated my orders to Colonel Jamais, and after consulting with Captains Marquessac and Miot, we decided to return. At 10 p. m. the entire corps was re-embarked, exhausted with fatigue, but happy at the result of the day's work.

I am, &c.,

MARCQ DE SAINTE-HILAIRE.



One of the most delicate operations was the establishment of the floating stages for the landing at Sfax. The following is the report of Captain Juge, who had charge of it under the orders of Captain de Sainte-Hilaire :

ON BOARD THE MARENGO,

*At Anchor off Sfax, July 18, 1881.*

ADMIRAL: I have the honor, in obedience to your orders, to report to you concerning the duty which was assigned me relative to the assembling of the floating bridge made in sections by the ironclads of the squadron, and taking it ashore to assist in landing our men.

At 3 a. m. Saturday, July 16, the steam-launch of the *Intrépide* shoved off from the *Marengo*, towing the whale-boats placed at my disposition, each boat having an officer in charge. We steered for the gunboats to whose care the different rafts had been confided the evening before. As soon as we arrived, the steam-launch took in tow the raft of the *Marengo*, which was to be the head of the bridge, and the others conducted by the whale-boats followed on behind, end to end. Under the supervision of the officers the lashings were promptly and securely made. The bridge being thus completed the whale-boats made fast along each side, and the steam-launch steering by the alignment of the two towers took us in to about 400 meters from the mole. At that distance I stopped and dropped a grapnel from the rear end, so that the steam-launch had only to tauten the tow-line to keep us on a line perpendicular to the beach; we thus offered the smallest target to the enemy and at the same time we were in the best position to work rapidly. It was then 4.20 a. m., and we remained in that position during the bombardment.

When the launches and mahonnes were almost abreast of us, by order of Captain de Marquessac, I sent the whale-boats to tow the mahonnes, keeping one man of each boat's crew for the oars of the bridge. The grapnel was weighed, the steam-launch went ahead, and the men pulled at the oars, trying to maintain the alignment of the bridge. We were soon obliged to cast off the tow, and we hauled ourselves in by means of a grapnel carried out by the *Trident's* dinghy, and a small anchor which I had sent ashore by the whale-boat of the *Marengo*. The boats which landed first interfered with our movements somewhat. We finally, however, made our bridge fast after the *Trident's* boat had landed, and our bridge served for the rest of the expeditionary force.

I am, &c.,

JUGE.

The command of the armed boats, which, by their active co-operation, protected the landing of the troops, was given, under the orders of Captain Marcq de Sainte-Hilaire, to Captain Trillot. This officer expressed himself as follows in his report to the commander-in-chief of the squadron of evolution :

ON BOARD THE FRIEDLAND,

*At Anchor off Sfax, July 19, 1881.*

ADMIRAL: I have the honor to bring to your notice, as briefly as possible, the following facts concerning my service and the military operations which were confided to me in the plan of attack on the town of Sfax:

The instructions which you were so kind as to give me verbally the night before, and which were repeated to me by Captain Vignes, chief of staff of the squadron, gave me the command of the armed boats, with the duty of approaching by daybreak as near as possible to the fortification on the beach. I was to order the beach to be swept by artillery and musketry fire in order to prevent the concentration of the enemy's troops coming from outside the walls to introduce succor or to act on the offensive; and I was to

suppress as far as possible the fire from the water-battery and the ramparts in order to facilitate the landing of the troops. Besides this, if the result should prove unfavorable to us, I was to protect the re-embarking of the troops.

The general dispositions for the combat so judiciously arranged, the dash, bravery, and the excellent discipline of the troops engaged, showed from the start that this last precautionary measure would not be needed and that the first part only of my instructions would require to be carried out. I had under my orders the armed boats of the first division of the squadron. They were commanded as follows: those of the Colbert by Lieutenant Légard, those of the Revanche by Lieutenant Bonnet, those of the Friedland by Lieutenant Gigon, and those of the Sarthe by Ensign Feraud; in all, eighteen boats, carrying, as artillery, four shell-guns of 12 centimeters, one gun of 4 centimeters, and thirteen revolving cannon. I should add to the military force two of the sheet-iron lighters of the transports, the Sarthe and the Intrépide, in which they had the happy thought of placing (in that of the Sarthe, commanded by Ensign Allenet) one gun of 14 centimeters, model of 1853, and in that of the Intrépide, commanded by Lieutenant Fort, a rifled gun of 16 centimeters. These two lighters rendered us great service during the action, and in spite of their slowness and unwieldiness, they distinguished themselves by their good services and by the zeal and dash of their personnel.

At 2.30 the boats left the respective vessels and assembled under my orders astern of the Alma, and at 4.30 they were arranged in order of attack in a single line abreast at 500 meters to the east of the water-battery. The evening before, in a night reconnoissance made with the captain of the Colbert, we had not been able to get very precise information about the channel to be followed even for boats going ashore. We ran aground several times in grass and shallow water.

At the first sound of artillery from the squadron I opened fire on the water-battery, from which some musket shots had been fired, as well as on a small fort in advance of the east front of the fortification. Behind some mounds of dried grass a number of Arabs were in ambush, and from time to time they would fire on our men. Our shell very soon set fire to the hay and produced an unhoped-for result in this respect, that the smoke, which was very dense and was urged by a fresh easterly breeze, obliged the garrison of the small fort to evacuate it, and by being driven in on the ramparts of the town it favored the attack and was very annoying to the defense. The ramparts in this place, as well as the trenches which we saw, seemed to be full of men; and our fire and the smoke together, as I have been informed by several officers of the landing party, obliged the enemy to make a rapid retreat. It was a useful diversion, which was contemplated in the outline of orders I had received.

Our fire, well directed, had lasted for some time, with prolonged intervals for the purpose of husbanding our ammunition, when the beach began to be covered with groups of Arabs on foot and on horseback running to the town, being attracted by the very lively cannonade and the sight of the mahonnes towed ashore full of troops. A well-sustained fire of shells from our revolving cannon, as well as the rapid fire of our small-arms, dissipated these groups and made the path which led from the gardens to the east entrance of the town very difficult if not impossible of access. The guns of the two lighters swept with their shells the villas and exterior gardens which served as a retreat for the fugitives.

This difficulty of access, if it did not arrest the enemy entirely, retarded at least the arrival of re-enforcements, and the rapidity of our attack, led so intrepidly, made good use of the time lost by the enemy.

The landing force approached, and the fire from the ramparts, until then very scattered and slow, became much livelier. It was necessary, before the landing could take place on the bridge, which was already in position, that the fire should become much less lively, if not made to cease altogether.

It was imperative to act quickly. I sent orders to the two lighters to approach the shore and to take the water-batteries and the south trench in enfilade. During this time

my boat kept up a constant fire of musketry and artillery on the same points. The guns of 14 and 16 centimeters had a serious task. Their shells and the machine-gun cast confusion among the enemy, slackened their fire, and assisted very much in the taking of the battery when our seamen courageously dashed through the embrasures and hoisted the French flag.

This being accomplished my attention was drawn to the beach and by the fire of our 12-centimeter shell-guns and the shell-guns of the lighters, I supported the attack of our troops on the houses next the ramparts and assisted in the taking of the road leading from the gardens, which I had rendered impassable during the morning.

At 9 o'clock our task was finished, and the rapid falling of the tide obliged us to haul off into the channel so as to be ready for any emergency. At the outset, before the attack, success seemed assured. We remained thus about 1,000 meters from the beach, anchored by our grapnels. I went ashore to inform Captain Marquessac, charged with the organization of affairs on the beach, that I held myself at his orders. I gave the men dinner, as they had had nothing since the night before, and I permitted them to take a short rest. As soon as the flood-tide made I weighed anchor and took up our morning position. It was here that the order reached me to go ashore and assist in the re-embarkation of the landing party. The operation was carried out rapidly and without disorder. Then, at the request of Colonel Jamais, I remained on-guard all night with two of my boats. Nothing of interest happened.

I think, Admiral, that I have usefully accomplished the trusts confided to me and that I have correctly interpreted the orders I received. I venture to hope that you will consider that the services rendered by the boats under my command have been all that could be hoped for from men who, though exhausted by fatigue, were animated by the best spirit of discipline and devotion. I have had occasion only to praise them and to congratulate them on their calmness and *sang froid*, which made my task an easy one. As for the officers I was sure of them beforehand, and convinced that, whatever might happen, they would rise to the occasion.

I am, &c.,

TRILLOT.

The capture of Sfax does great honor to our brave sailors and to the gallant officers who commanded them. A landing in the face of an enemy so near the shore could not take place without presenting many difficulties of execution and many real dangers. Thanks to the prudent and ingenious measures taken by the commander-in-chief, and to the dash of our men, our losses were not nearly so great as was to be feared.

#### OCCUPATION OF CABES.

JULY 24, 1881.

On the 21st of July the *Léopard* brought orders for the commander-in-chief of the squadron of evolution to leave Sfax and repair to Cables with all the vessels of his squadron, two ironclads of the division of the Levant and four gunboats. On the evening of July 23 the *La Gallissonnière*, the *Reine-Blanche*, the *Voltigeur*, the *Hyène*, the *Léopard*, the *Gladiateur*, and the *Chacal* left the anchorage off Sfax, where the *Terrible*, the *Pique*, and the *Alma* had been left in observation, and arrived at daybreak before Cables. These vessels anchored as close in shore as possible. Springs had been prepared so that as soon as the anchors were down the broadsides were brought to bear on the beach. While this

was being done the boats were armed and the naval brigade took its place in them.

Appearances seemed to show that there would be no resistance encountered at the outset. The Arabs, taken completely by surprise, had not had time to assemble on the plain, but they could be seen running from all sides towards the village of Mentzel, while those of the population who would be useless for the defense were seen going out with camels and baggage.

Towards 6 a. m. the naval brigade reached the shore, but not without some trouble. The nature of the beach was such that the men could not land dry-shod, and they were obliged to jump into the water. The sea being smooth just then, the inconvenience was not very great; but the breeze having freshened a little during the day from the east the communication became difficult, and the re-embarkation of the troops that were to return on board in the evening bade fair to be interrupted. The river Gabes was not available for the purpose of landing, as its mouth was obstructed by a bar which, even at high water, would allow only the lightest kind of boats to enter. Besides this the left bank of the river is covered with a thick wood, very favorable to ambuscades, of which the Arabs did not fail to profit, and in which they had even placed two cannon. These guns, which had been immediately perceived by the *Léopard*, anchored at the mouth of the river, served as a target for her fire. The Arabs who served the guns soon abandoned them, and Lieutenant Mallarmé, captain of the *Léopard*, lost no time in taking possession of them.

The naval brigade, having landed without being disturbed, formed on the beach. While a few of the companies marched towards the governor's house, the doors of which were so strong and so solidly closed that it was necessary to blow them open, the greater part of them marched carefully and in good order towards the village, Mentzel.

The commander-in-chief had thought that the occupation of the governor's house without striking a blow would not be in proportion to the force employed, and that this simple operation would not sufficiently impress the Arabs. Admiral Conrad had in consequence given orders to Captain Marcq de Saint-Hilaire, commanding the naval brigade, to march upon Mentzel, to make upon it a serious demonstration, and, if not too formidable, to take possession of it. But the commander-in-chief had at the same time made known his firm intention of not occupying any village far from the beach.

Toward 10 a. m. the fort which commanded Mentzel and the outlying village, Dzara, were in the possession of our troops. These two villages were in great part occupied by our men. Captain Marcq, not wishing to engage farther away from the beach nor to expose his men to useless losses, gave the order to fall back on the house of the governor. This movement, carried out slowly and calmly, brought our seamen back under shelter from the heat of a burning sun. They were able to dine

in peace and to rest themselves while waiting for the sea to go down, so that the extra companies could return on board. It was while the men were thus resting in the afternoon that the fort of Mentzel was blown up.

Though landing at Cables presented no difficulties or dangers comparable with those at the capture of Sfax, it nevertheless was conducted with boldness and skill. The following is the report of the officer in command, Captain Marcq de Saint-Hilaire, to the commander-in-chief of the squadron of evolution :

ON BOARD THE COLBERT,

*At Anchor off Cables, July 25, 1881.*

ADMIRAL : I have the honor to submit to you my report on the landing effected before the town of Mentzel (Gulf of Cables) during July 24.

Your orders directed me to land on the right bank of the river, to occupy the house of the governor, and then to march upon Mentzel at 3 kilometers from the beach, but without incurring any unnecessary risk; to try to take some hostages there; then to fall back, leaving at the governor's house troops enough to occupy it in safety and to return on board with the rest of the men.

For that operation you placed under my orders the companies of the six ironclads and two dispatch-boats of the squadron, with their artillery, besides the companies of the La Gallissonière, the Reine-Blanche, and the Voltigeur, with their artillery also; in all 1,100 infantry and seventeen pieces of artillery. We were to be supported, if necessary, by the fire of the armed boats and by that of the vessels. As nearly as we could judge the Arabs numbered 400 to 500 cavalry, grouped mostly on the high ground to the left, and from 1,500 to 2,000 infantry in the town and the neighboring villages. It was said that they expected re-enforcements.

The anchorages of the ships indicated not only the order in which the boats should assemble, but also the order of the formation on shore. On the left were the companies of the Marengo and of the Surveillante, under the orders of Captain Maréchal, charged especially with the duty of guarding that flank which, as it was an open plain, was liable to be attacked by the enemy's cavalry. In the center, which was my post, were the Tridents, the Colberts, and the Desaixs, under the orders of Lieutenant Lucas, and to them was assigned the occupation of the small fort and afterwards the attack on the center of the town. On the right were the companies of the Revanche, Friedland, and Hironde, under the orders of Lieutenant Texier, who were in the first place to take possession of the governor's house, then occupy the village of Dzara, and finally to attack the town of Mentzel on the right, guarding the bridge which connects Mentzel with Dzara. The La Gallissonnières and the Voltigeurs, under the orders of Captain de Courtivron, were to remain at the house of the governor, to watch the river, which is everywhere fordable, and to assure communication with the beach. The Reine-Blanches served as a general reserve and were to be kept 300 or 400 meters in rear of the first line. I reserved her men to guard against any unforeseen contingencies that might present themselves. The artillery, under the orders of Captain Tabareau, was distributed in the center and on the wings in rear of the companies.

The rallying points were the governor's house or the little fort, according to circumstances. Mr. Gillet, chief surgeon in charge of the ambulances, had orders to establish himself as soon as possible in the governor's house. Captain Trillot, in charge of the boats, was after the landing to bear a little to the right and take measures to protect and facilitate a re-embarkation.

The vessels were no sooner anchored than they armed their boats, and at 6.15 the landing was effected without firing a shot. The beach was deserted; the large boats could not approach the shore any nearer than 50 meters, and the whale-boats were obliged to act as ferry-boats; many of the men in their haste jumped into the water and waded

ashore. As soon as formed we took up our march in the order mentioned above. On the neighboring hills a considerable movement of the cavalry was observed. The sandy nature of the soil made the progress of the artillery very difficult, and the crews had to be helped by men from the companies. The house of the governor was found to be deserted, and was occupied without any trouble.

When we arrived at about a thousand meters from the fort we fired a few shell at it, and also a few volleys of musketry. It seemed to me that no reply was made, although it was found soon afterwards that there were guns there which had very recently been fired. After a few minutes we saw a white flag waved from the gate. We occupied the fort, and sent the men we found there, about twenty in number, to the rear, and from there they were sent aboard ship. Having no interpreter, I did not know until some time afterward that these men were Tunisians. I gave orders to destroy the arms and powder and to spike the guns after having thrown them into the ditch, but to spare the fort itself, which, poor as it was, might be of service in case of a definitive occupation.

The right wing encountered some resistance at the faubourg of Dzara, some houses of which it occupied. During this time the center began its attack on the town of Mentzel. The artillery had commenced its fire, and our riflemen exchanged shots with the Arabs concealed in the houses, nearly all of which were furnished with loop-holes. When the right wing arrived in line the companies of the Trident and of the Colbert made a bayonet charge and entered the town by different streets, some of which were obstructed by barricades, which the torpedo party were obliged to blow up. At the same time the Friedland's men entered the town on the right. The left, in obedience to its orders, held itself on the left of the town, but without entering, and fired on the retreating enemy. At several places a hand-to-hand combat with the cavalry took place. We had eight men wounded, two of them seriously. After a quarter of an hour of hard fighting we were masters of the town, and we established ourselves in two mosques, where we found several red and green flags; we also took possession of the house of the Cadi and of the telegraph office. The Arabs took flight in different directions, but as it seemed to me all the cavalry went to the left.

I thought it useless to pursue the enemy beyond the town, as we did not intend to occupy it. Besides this, I did not care to have my men drawn into a lengthened pursuit, which would have rendered a rallying difficult, and might have caused an embarrassing transportation of wounded men; it was also necessary to provide against the return of the enemy's cavalry by way of the vast plain behind us. I therefore gave orders to hold our positions for some time in order to affirm our possession, but not to push on any further. It seemed to me that your instructions were fulfilled, for at that time I imagined that I had captured a chief of some importance, in the fort.

The heat was overwhelming. Ensign Dutard of the Revanche was sunstruck, but happily he was not seriously injured.

At 9.45 we evacuated the town and formed for our march to the rear, which was made in the same order as our advance. The Arabs did not molest us on the march, but after we had gone some distance we could see some of the cavalry re-enter the town. About noon we once more occupied the governor's house, where every one was placed as well as possible under shelter from the sun, leaving outside only a sufficient guard; the ration of wine which was in the launches was served out to the men. I detailed the companies of the Friedland and of the Revanche and the first battery of artillery (six pieces), to remain on shore; the accommodations were sufficient, and there was absolute security against the Arabs, since they had no artillery.

The house was immediately placed in a state of defense; the approaches were cleared of all that could conceal an advance of the enemy, the openings were barricaded and a battery of six pieces was established on the terrace, in the parapet of which embrasures were cut. About 2 p. m. several shells were fired at the fort, of which the Arabs had retaken possession; this was done more to adjust the sights and to ascertain the solidity of the terrace than with any idea of driving the Arabs out. Some few minutes after our last

shot the fort blew up, either from the effect of our shell or from carelessness on the part of the Arabs; however it was, there seemed to be many of them in the fort at the time.

Captain Trillot having reported to me that on account of the sea-breeze the shore had become very difficult of access, I took measures for a successive re-embarkation. The wounded were first sent on board and then the companies of the division of the Levant. The latter were already partly embarked when your order reached me to take measures in view of a possible occupation by these same companies. I therefore ordered them to land again and await further orders, which did not arrive until 5 o'clock; they required me to return on board with the men of the squadron, and to leave on shore the men of the Levant division. As soon as the latter had taken possession of the house I started to return with the four last companies. The Surveillantes, the Marengos, and the dispatch-boats had already been sent back. The embarkation took place with the utmost difficulty; the sea broke at a hundred meters from the beach, the large boats could not approach any nearer, and even the whale-boats had to remain at some distance, and then they threatened to fill at any moment; however, in one way or another we managed to embark the material. As for the men, they were obliged to undress, and by carrying their clothes and equipments suspended by their bayonets they were able to reach the whale-boats, by which they were conveyed to the larger boats. Many of them were rolled over by the surf, but there was fortunately no accident.

The night was perfectly dark when the embarkation was completed. At 9.30 p. m. every one had returned on board except the Friedlands, whose boats, occupied in taking ashore provisions for them (as they at first were to remain) had not been available until much later. I did not think it advisable to have them embark under the circumstances; they were employed in covering the embarkation, and were then sent back to the house of the governor. After having patrolled the beach the next morning they returned on board.

I am glad to recognize the ardor displayed by every one in this little operation, an ardor which, however, did not interfere with the order and regularity often so difficult to obtain.

I am, &c.,

MARCQ DE BLOND DE SAINT-HILAIRE

Our seamen encountered at Mentzel and Dzara a serious resistance, which owed most of its stubbornness to fanaticism. If our losses were relatively light it should be ascribed to the prudence of our operations, the wisdom of the commander, and the discipline of the men.

On July 26 the squadron set sail for Goleta, touching at Mehediah, Monaster, and Susa. From Goleta it went to Bona and then to Biserta. It returned to Bona and went from there to Algiers, and finally to Toulon.

#### *OCCUPATION OF THE ISLAND OF JERBAH.*

**JULY 28.**

In order to complete the measures taken to insure the security of the southeast coast of the Regency there remained to be occupied the island of Jerbah. During the night of the 27th and 28th of July, Admiral Conrad took possession of Houm-Souk, the principal town of that island. The following is the admiral's report, addressed to the Minister of Marine:

*JERBAH, July 28, 1881.*

I ordered, to-night, the occupation of the port of Houm-Souk, capital of Jerbah island, by a party of troops of the expeditionary force, under the command of Colonel Jamais;

his military position is safe from attack. I am waiting for a battalion and a section of artillery, coming from Sfax by the *Intrépide*; we shall thus be masters of the entire island, whose authorities have submitted to the government, no longer fearing the incursions of the Arabs, which it will be very easy to prevent by occupying the forts commanding the fords communicating with the mainland. The vessels being anchored ten miles from the shore, the difficulties of the night-landing were very great, there being a heavy sea and a stiff breeze; nevertheless no accident happened.

The *Oise* and the *Tromblou* assisted in the landing, and the barges brought by the *Oise* enabled us to land the entire personnel at one time.

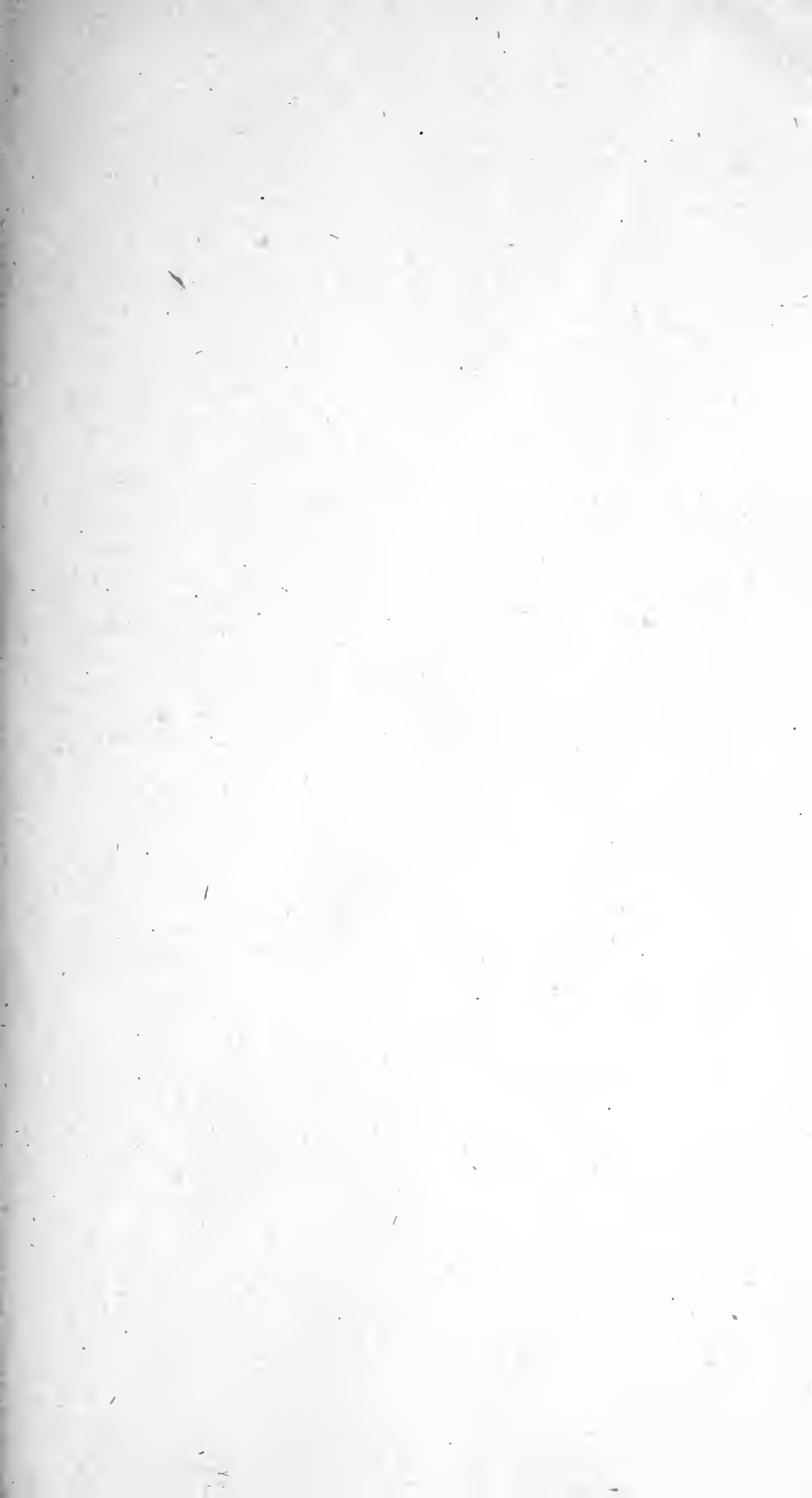
I left the *Hyène* at Cabes, where I shall return as soon as possible; but I think it very important to show myself before Zarzis to judge of the situation there, as it is on the frontier, and is said to be very hostile to us.

#### *OCCUPATION OF SUSA.*

**SEPTEMBER 11, 1881.**

The occupation of Susa having been decided upon, the steamers *Ajaccio* and *Kleber*, of the Transatlantic Company, left Toulon carrying 1,500 men, while the *Tarn* embarked the troops of the administrative services and a battery of artillery, all destined for Susa. The *Alma* and the *La Gallissonière*, under the command of Admiral Conrad, received orders to accompany the transports and to protect the landing. Leaving Toulon on the evening of September 9 the *Ajaccio* and the *Kleber* anchored at 6 a. m. of the 10th in the roadstead of Susa. The squadron did not arrive until an hour and a half later, and negotiations for the surrender of Susa were immediately set on foot. It was expected that resistance would be made, but there was none. The commander of the town was, on the contrary, of a very accommodating disposition, which was no doubt caused by fear of a bombardment. He gave up voluntarily the Casbah and all the strategic points of the town. The landing immediately commenced. The *Alma* sent her boats for the troops of the *Ajaccio*, and the *La Gallissonière* sent hers for the troops of the *Kleber*, and two hours afterwards the French flag floated over the Casbah side by side with the flag of the Bey. The last operation of the Navy was thus confined to a simple taking possession.









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